

They said, “Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will listen.” (24:7)

When a friend comes over to ask for a favor, the usual responses are: “Depends on what you ask”; “If it does not take too much time; “If it does not conflict with my schedule;” “If it is ‘legal.’” Rarely does one respond, “Sure, whatever you want.” Having said this, let us now appreciate *Klal Yisrael’s* response to Hashem’s Torah: *Naaseh v’Nishma*; “We will do, and we will listen.” No questions; no stipulations, no reasons: simply, whatever Hashem asks of us we are prepared to do. Veritably, this response is part of our DNA. When Hashem called Avraham *Avinu*, the Patriarch’s immediate reply was, *Hineni*, “I am here,” ready and willing to do whatever is asked of me. “It depends” is not part of our spiritually-oriented lexicon. This is the meaning of *Naaseh v’Nishma*, “We are servants of Hashem.” As such, we make no stipulations. Servants act, they say “yes” without reservation, without contingency. They are servants.

When *Klal Yisrael* happily declared *naaseh v’Nishma*, Hashem raised the mountain over their heads and said, “If you accept the Torah – good; if not – there will be your graves.” Religious coercion would be the immediate reaction of those who do not possess a modicum of *seichel*, common sense. Obviously, when something is crucial for a person’s life, compelling him to take it is not coercion. Imagine (an analogy used by the *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists) that a child steps on a rusty nail. His father takes him to the doctor, who prepares to give him a tetanus shot. The child demurs. The father insists. The child screams, “Absolutely not; it will hurt.” His father does not accept “no,” because the pain that the shot might cause cannot in any way be compared to the pain and dire consequences of not being inoculated. Coercion is a term that is applied when one has a choice and is forced to act against his choice. We have no choice with regard to Torah acceptance. One must understand that if he does not accept the Torah, the consequences are dire and permanent. Hashem was intimating in very definite terms that accepting the Torah was not optional. The alternative is: “There will be your graves.”

It goes even further. The term *adam*, man, human being, *mentch*, applies only to one who accepts the Torah. *Horav Reuven Karlinsten*, *zl*, observes that on *Pesach* we offer the *Korban Omer* which consists of *seorim*, barley, while on *Shavuot* we bring the *Shte HaLechem*, Two Loaves of bread, which are made of wheat. Barley is the food of animals. What is the food of humans? Is the Torah telling us something? *Rav Karlinsten* explains that *Pesach* precedes *Shavuot*, the festival marking the giving and acceptance of the Torah. Since on *Pesach* we have not yet been inducted into the Torah way of life, our *korban*, offering, is comprised of barley, animal feed. We have yet to achieve human being status. *Shavuot* celebrates this milestone. We are now worthy of being called *adam*, man. Our offering has been upgraded to wheat.

Shlomo Hamelech says (*Koheles* 12:13), *Sof davar hakol nishma es haElokim yera v’es Mitzvosav shmor, ki zeh kol ha’adam*, “The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: Fear G-d and keep His commandments for this is (all of) a man’s (whole duty).” Ostensibly, we are being

forewarned to observe all of Hashem's *mitzvos*, to follow in His ways. Why the concluding words: *ki zeh kol ha'adam*? What does this have to do with *mitzvah* observance? *Horav Elchonon Wasserman, zl*, explains that the *pasuk* is giving the reader the definition of a Torah mentor: a *yarei Shomayim* who performs *mitzvos*. He can only be considered an *adam* if he fulfills these two criteria. Apparently, there must be a difference between man and the Torah's designation of *Adam*. Indeed, we find that *Chazal* state, *Atem kiruyin Adam v'l'oumos ha'olam k'ruyim adam*; "You (*Klal Yisrael*) are called *adam* (bestowed with the designation of Adam), but not the nations of the world."

A number of explanations are offered for this *Chazal*. I would like to use *Horav S.R. Hirsch's* definition of *adam* as being related to *hadom*, footstool, in a phonetical analysis. Man is the footstool for the Divine, so to speak. Hashem rests upon us. Man is the closest revelation of the Divine on earth. As transmitter and bearer of the glory of G-d on earth, *hadom/adam* spares a Superior Being from placing His feet on earth. Thus, by achieving Hashem's Will, we spare Him from having directly to fulfill His will on earth. This obviously can only be achieved by an *adam/man* who can, by his actions, represent the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence.

The following story (related by *Rav Reuven Karlinstein*) is a classic, in the sense that it gives the reader an idea of the meaning of Torah to the Jew, as well as how a Jew who does not learn Torah – even if he is involved in all types of *mitzvos* and carries out varied forms of *chesed*, acts of lovingkindness – appears. Torah is vital; it is critical not only to our being included in the "*adam*" designation, it is who we are. Thus, without it, we are missing a crucial part of our DNA.

The *Mashgiach*, *Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl*, was undisputedly a saintly and holy person whose entire life was intertwined with Torah. Torah was a part of him. He was *kulo* Torah, all Torah. Nonetheless, he was not satisfied. He felt deficient since he was not actively involved in performing acts of *chesed*. He decided that (in order to fulfill the requirement of performing *chesed*) he would establish a *g'mach*, acronym for *Gemillas Chesed*, organization for the performance of good deeds, a free loan organization, whereby he would lend money to those in need. It was a great idea, one which would greatly benefit the Jewish community. There was one "minor" issue: the *Mashgiach* had no money. It was impossible to lend money to those in need if he had nothing to lend. He turned to his students and asked if they might know someone who had excess money who would be willing to share in the *z'chus*, merit, of this *g'mach*.

The students let the word out that the venerable *Mashgiach* was searching for a partner for his *g'mach*. It did not take long before a wealthy Jew from New York answered the call of the *Mashgiach*. Although not a student of either the *Mashgiach* or any of the *yeshivos* where the *Mashgiach* had served in this position, the man was excited to help, and he did so with an impressive sum. This was the basis of the *Mashgiach's* famous, often-used *g'mach*. The man's reward was incredible *nachas*, spiritual satisfaction, from his children, sons and sons-in-law, each achieving distinguished *ben Torah* status, with his grandchildren beginning to follow in their path. Yet, there was one request this man had: he yearned for a visit with the *Mashgiach*. The

Mashgiach was a busy person, wholly devoted to his many students and to his own personal *avodas ha'kodesh*, service to Hashem. Still, he was a *mechutan*, close relative; like the parents of a *chosson/kallah*, they shared in a joint investment. Therefore, he left for *Eretz Yisrael* and proceeded to visit the *Mashgiach*.

The man introduced himself as the *Mashgiach's* partner. The *Mashgiach* was a man of few words. He replied, "I have heard that you support all of your children in their Torah pursuits. This is impressive. May Hashem grant you the years and wherewithal to continue in this lofty endeavor." The *Mashgiach* suddenly stopped speaking and looked pensively at the man before him. "Tell me," the *Mashgiach* asked, "do you learn?" The man was floored. How should he respond? To tell the truth that he did not make the time to learn would be a disaster. No one tells the *Mashgiach* that he cannot somehow find the time to learn. To lie would be unthinkable. So, he said the truth, "I do not personally have time to study Torah."

The *Mashgiach* remained silent, digesting the man's response. How could an observant Jew not make the time to learn? "Do you realize that you will leave this world naked; you will have nothing in *Olam Habba*?" End of conversation. The *Mashgiach* returned to his learning. The man, visibly shaken, left the *Mashgiach's* home. As soon as he returned home, he proceeded to the home of one of the *Roshei Yeshivah* whose *yeshivah* he supported and said, "*Rebbe*, you must find me a *chavrusa*, study partner." The *Rosh Yeshivah* was taken aback by this "unusual" request. In the past, their conversation had always been about money, how much he was willing to contribute to the *yeshivah*. It was never about his learning. Something was amiss. "Is everything alright with you?" the *Rosh Yeshivah* asked. "It is unlike you to come to me to set up a *chavrusa* for you. Has something happened that I should know about?"

The man opened up to him and explained that the *Mashgiach* had told him that, without Torah study, he would be leaving this world barren, totally exposed, without any protection for what might await him in the World to Come. He must devote a part of his day to Torah study. It must become an integral part of his day. This way he would no longer leave this world unprotected. The *Rosh Yeshivah* himself became the man's *chavrusa*.

Two lessons can be derived from this story. First, we see how *Rav Chatzkel*, the *Mashgiach*, defined *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. This man had enabled him, via his gift, to establish a *g'mach* through which he had helped many in need. The *Mashgiach's* idea of gratitude was not offering accolades and praises (usually for the purpose of extracting another contribution). He gave the man the ultimate gift, by implying to him that he would not receive the welcome in *Olam Habba* that he was expecting. Second, why would he not receive a great welcome? That he was not learning should not have devalued his multifarious acts of *zedakah* and *chesed*. He supported his entire family in *kollel*, and contributed heavily to *yeshivos* and *mosdos ha'chinuch*. Yet, the *Mashgiach* said that despite his wonderful works of *chesed*, if he did not study Torah, he would receive a "cold" (since he would be naked) welcome in *Gan Eden*: *Ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu*, "For they are our life and the length of our days." *More Torah equals more life.*